DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 079 EA 026 733

TITLE	Multiage Grouping. Occasional Paper Series: Volume IX, Number 1.
INSTITUTION	Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast & Islands, Andover, MA.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	94
CONTRACT	RP91002008
NOTE	15p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast & Islands, 300 Brickstone Square, Suite 950, Andover, MA 01810 (Stock No. 9099; $2.50 plus $2.50 shipping and handling).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Continuous Progress Plan; Developmental Continuity; Elementary Secondary Education; *Flexible Progression; Instructional Program Divisions; *Mixed Age Grouping; Multiunit Schools; *Nongraded Instructional Grouping; Open Education; School Organization; *Student Centered Curriculum; Student Development

ABSTRACT

Multiage grouping is one way schools can organize around students and their learning. In multiage grouping, students of different chronological ages are intentionally assigned to the same classroom. Multiage grouping may also be called "mixed age." Other terms, such as "nongraded," "ungraded," "multigrade," or "split-grade," are often used interchangeably with mixed-age grouping but can mean different things. This document describes, through a question-and-answer format, what multiage grouping is and how it operates. The following concerns are addressed: the multiage philosophical basis, benefits, patterns of age grouping, the optimal age spread of a classroom, ways in which learning is managed, curriculum, teacher qualifications and needs, resources and instructional strategies, parent involvement, and the amount of time needed for implementation of a multiage program. Characteristics of multiage classrooms include: more positive student attitudes; fewer classroom management problems; yearly continuity; a norm that values each child; cooperative learning; and a family-like atmosphere. Contains a representative list of schools using multiage grouping in the northeast and four references. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 383 079

EA

Multiage Grouping

The Regional Laboratory
for Educational Improvement of the Northeast & Islands

EA 026 733

2

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Multiage Grouping

Occasional Paper Series: Volume IX, Number 1

The Regional Laboratory
for Educational Improvement of the Northeast & Islands
300 Brickstone Square, Suite 950, Andover, MA 01810 • (800) 347-4200

This is one of a series of occasional papers published by The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands. Because the educators and policy makers we serve have a variety of needs, this series addresses a wide range of topics and multiple perspectives. Some of the papers are brief essays that frame an issue or raise controversial but important ideas. Other papers are more extensive and provide the kind of well-researched knowledge that educators and policy makers can rely on when making decisions about children's education. The series currently includes:

Building Inclusive Schools: Places Where All Children Can Learn
High School: The American Walkabout
Multiage Grouping
School Boards and School Restructuring: A Contradiction in Terms?
Trends and Issues in Professional Development: Foundations for Effective Learning
Violence and Traumatic Stress in Urban Schools

We welcome your thoughts about any of the papers as well as ideas for future publications. Please send your comments to the Publications Department at The Regional Laboratory, 300 Brickstone Square, Suite 950, Andover, Massachusetts 01810, (800) 347-4200.

© 1994 by The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands
300 Brickstone Square, Suite 950, Andover, MA 01810

This publication is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, under contract number RP91-002-008. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of the department or any other agency of the U.S. government.
The Regional Laboratory is an equal opportunity affirmative action employer.

What is multiage grouping?

Multiage grouping is one way schools can organize around students and their learning, rather than around grade cut-offs and curriculum scope and sequence. In multiage grouping, students of different chronological ages are intentionally assigned to the same classroom. We say "intentionally" because every classroom teacher knows that a class of children is likely to include children of a wide age range, depending on the retention policy of the district and other such factors. Even more than that, every classroom teacher knows that children in a given class will be "all over the map" developmentally, with a range of abilities often spanning several grades. Multiage grouping recognizes these things as facts of life and organizes around them, rather than acting as though all students are the same and developing "remediation" or special programs for those who are the exception. Our interest in multiage goes beyond the cross-age grouping to include approaches that center on the child: e.g., constructivist approaches, developmentally appropriate education, "multiple intelligences," continuous progress.

In multiage classrooms, children work in groups consisting of two or more age levels; the same peer group may remain together for more than one year. Students may work with one teacher, a teacher team, or interact with several different teachers during the day.

Multiage grouping may also be called "mixed age." The term "multiage" is often used interchangeably with the terms "nongraded," "ungraded," "multigrade," "split-grade," or "combination" but these terms can mean different things. Closest to multiage in concept is an ungraded or nongraded school where grade level designations are abandoned, and children of different ages and abilities work to-

gether. A multiage classroom also consists of different ages and abilities, and children are not identified by grade level but by "clusters.

The words "ungraded" and "nongraded" are sometimes used in reference to the way student progress is reported, that is, without use of letter grades. While multiage grouping may tend to be associated with narrative summaries of student progress or other approaches that do not use letter grades, they are not the same thing.

Finally, classrooms identified as "multigrade," "split-grade," or "combined" include children from more than one grade level, but children continue to be identified by grade level. In these classrooms, while children may be grouped cross-grade and therefore cross-age for some work, the concept of grade levels is likely to be more salient than developmentally appropriate educational practices.

What is the philosophical basis for a multiage classroom?

Multiage classrooms are grounded in research on child development and learning, which recognizes that children's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional abilities will emerge on a timeline that is unique for each child, and that these abilities will not always develop in the same order, or at the same rate. This means that a child's development in different areas will not be uniform; it also means that children of the same chronological age will be in different places developmentally on different aspects of their growth.

Multiage grouping is therefore often associated with developmentally appropriate education, continuous progress, and contructivist approaches that emphasize the child's growth with reference to the child and to widely agreed upon developmental benchmarks, not in comparing children with one another or ranking them. The focus in learning is high expectations for all, not competition to see who is first.

Multiage classrooms are based on the belief that children benefit from interactions with other children who are at varied stages of development. It is also felt that the "mixing" of ages provides greater diversity, and more accurately mirrors life in the family and the community. This differs markedly from the traditional notion of sorting and scheduling children by age or ability alone.

What are the benefits of a multiage classroom?

Research studies show that children in multiage classrooms have more positive attitudes toward school, themselves, and their peers. Many teachers report that there are fewer classroom management problems in multiage classrooms; teachers in multiage classrooms learn to manage their classrooms so that children become self-regulating and help each other to "learn the rules." Multiage classrooms appear to be especially beneficial for children who need more time and/or more ways for learning. Continuity from year to year is seen as one of the biggest advantages of multiage classrooms.

When implemented as developmentally appropriate education, multiage grouping enables children to progress at their own rate, making continuous progress rather than being limited to rigid grade-level structures. Advocates argue that multiage grouping works because:

- There is a norm in the classroom that says that everyone is both a learner and a teacher; that everyone has strengths and areas that need strengthening; that developing as a good writer, reader, etc., is a life-long occupation — no one is ever "done."

- Learning tasks are designed for students' developmental stages cognitively, emotionally, socially, and physically, not for a uniform and often arbitrary notion of what constitutes grade-level work.

- Teachers use a variety of approaches to help children master concepts and skills; tasks can be designed to give children not only more opportunities to practice if needed, but also different opportunities.

- Students have the opportunity to practice knowledge and skills in a variety of capacities — for example, in peer editing, in direct instruction, in cooperative groups, etc.

- Children work naturally at their own levels without being labeled in any way and/or "pulled out" for remediation or enrichment.

- Teachers who work with students over several years get to know the children well and thus provide greater continuity.

- The structure lends itself to a more integrated curriculum approach, with opportunities for cooperative learning and peer tutoring.

- Team-teaching and a family-like atmosphere produce a better learning environment.

- There is less anxiety at the start of the new school year because teacher and children already know each other.

- Little learning time is lost to review at the beginning of the school year and children already understand clas. room rules and expectations.

What patterns of age grouping are there?

Modern one-room schools may have children spanning the ages 6 to 12 who work together in different configurations. While students of any age can be grouped into multiage clusters, the more typical grouping patterns are ages 5-7, 7-9, 10-12, 13-15, 15-16, 17-18 (the equivalent of what would be grades K or 1-3, 4-6, 7-8, 9-10, and 11-12). Another variation might include 5 to 7 year-olds, 7-9, 9-11, (or a K-1, 2-3, 4-5 arrangement). Some schools use a group of children aged 6 through 9 (or grades 1-4 arrangement). Children advance to the next cluster at approximately the same times that they would in a conventional graded school.

Children may have the same teacher for two or three years, or there may be a different teacher for each year with the children staying together. Grouping may fluctuate during the day, with students working in different configurations depending on the learning task.

What is the optimal age spread within a multiage classroom?

Most multiage classrooms span two years, although some span three There are developmental considerations — for example, major cognitive shifts that occur roughly around age 9 or 10 and then again around ages 13 or 14, along with the social differences between young children aged 5 to 7 or 8, middle children of 8 to 10 or 11, and young adolescents between 12 and 14 — that support the patterns of age clustering outlined above.

How is learning in a multiage classroom managed?

True multiage grouping requires teachers to expand their repertoire of instructional practices well beyond teacher-maintained discipline and whole-class direct instruction using one set of textbooks. As we noted above, teachers in multiage classrooms learn to share classroom management with their students, so that students learn to be responsible for themselves and others both in the work of the classroom and its maintenance. Teachers also use multiage grouping as an opportunity for authentic work using primary sources, experiences outside the classroom, community members as resources, etc. Therefore, learning in a multiage class is likely to be more active, "hands on," and often project-based.

There is continuous monitoring and assessment of learning by both teachers and students. Because the classroom is organized around the children, teachers look at where a particular child is to determine what is appropriate to come next. Teachers keep clipboards handy at the various work stations to note their observations of the children; children learn to assess their own work and to work with the teacher to set learning goals.

Children are constantly regrouped for various activities. This prevents younger children from becoming too dependent on an older student, and prevents older ones from becoming too controlling or domineering. This also helps teachers stay alert to the interests of children or the needs that they may have.

Multiage classrooms continually seek to assess the relationship between teaching and learning. It is a learner-centered environment rather than a teacher-centered one.

What does the curriculum look like in a multiage classroom?

The curriculum for a multiage classroom is based on learning activities and materials that are appropriate to the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual age-span in the cluster. The multiage classroom recognizes the individual personality, learning style, and family background of each student in the way learning experiences are designed. Teachers work together to prepare a learning environment characterized by:

- Use of projects and learning centers to stimulate inquiry and provide choices.

- Incorporation of student interest and suggestions to plan lessons and assignments.

- Interaction between students, between students and adults, and among students, adults, and community resources.

- Time scheduled for individual reflection, small group work, and whole-group meetings.

- Learning activities and materials that represent real-world tasks and are relevant to students' lives.

- Involvement of parents in student-led conferences, opportunities to assist in classrooms, and home-based activities to support learning.

- Assessment of individual progress through teacher observation and record-keeping, student portfolios, and videotaped projects and performances.

Who should teach in a multiage classroom?

Teachers of multiage classrooms must be able to monitor and adjust instruction. They also need to have a high tolerance for noise and activity. Multiage classrooms are busy places, with several groups working simultaneously. The teacher role is focused on facilitation and coordination.

Are multiage classrooms best taught by teacher teams?

Yes, teams increase the variety of learning and teaching opportunities. In addition, teams more accurately diagnose any learning difficulties and develop the appropriate instructional response.

Will teachers need additional planning time?

Yes, it is important to incorporate adequate time for teacher teams to meet and plan, and to assess student progress. There must be the time and opportunity to share concerns and to solve problems.

What kinds of resources are needed?

Multiage classrooms are sometimes larger than regular classrooms, and require adequate space for groups to move around and regroup for learning activities. Because there are a wide range of skills and abilities, there must be a large supply of materials available. Money for training and consultants is also an important part of establishing a multiage classroom, as is visiting and observing other multiage classrooms.

What kinds of instructional strategies work best in a multiage classroom?

Cooperative learning and peer tutoring are well-suited to the multiage classroom. Many teachers plan theme or interdisciplinary units. A wide-range of learning modalities are utilized. Because of the developmental nature of these classrooms, process writing, whole language, and whole math work well. This does not mean that work in phonics, computation, etc., are excluded.

How can parents and the community get involved with a multiage classroom?

A study group consisting of teachers, parents, and community members should be formed at the beginning of the planning process to look at issues and address questions and concerns as they arise. It is important to keep the communication open to allow opportunities for information and input. Parents and community members can also be helpful as resource persons.

How long does it take to fully implement a multiage classroom?

It takes at least one or two years "to get ready," which includes training, reading, visits to other schools, and meetings. It will then take another two to three years for the multiage classroom to become fully operational.

Where can we read more about multiage classrooms?

Goodlad, John I. and Robert Anderson. 1987. *The Nongraded Elementary School.* Revised Edition. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hunter, Madeline. 1992. *How to Change to a Nongraded School.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Miller, Bruce A. 1989. The *Multigrade Classroom: A Resource Handbook for Small, Rural Schools.* Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Rathbone, Charles; et al. 1993. *Multiage Portraits: Teaching and Learning in Mixed-age Classrooms.* Peterborough, NH: Crystal Springs Books.

Where can we see multiage grouping?*

Connecticut

John Lyman School
106 Way Road
Middlefield, CT 06455
(203) 349-3439
Contact: Janet Yuse, Principal

East Rock Community School
133 Nash Street
New Haven, CT 06511
(203) 787-8685
Contact: Lisette McGowen, Bilingual Supervisor

Washington Hooker Elementary School
180 Canner Street
New Haven, CT 06511
(203) 787-8685
Contact: Lisette McGowen, Bilingual Supervisor

Massachusetts

Thompson School
60 North Union Street
Arlington, MA 02174
(617) 641-5468
Contact: Michael McCabe, Principal

Trotter School
135 Humboldt Avenue
Dorchester, MA 02121
(617) 445-0791
Contact: Muriel Leonard, Principal

Ezra Baker School
810 Main Street
West Dennis, MA 02670
(508) 398-7691
Contact: Frances Meyer, Principal

Maine

Athens Elementary School
P.O. Box 265
Athens, ME 04912
(207) 654-2561
Contact: Judith Liston, Teacher

Mast Landing School
Freeport, ME 04032
(207) 865-4561
Contact: Irv Richardson,
Teaching Principal

New Suncook School
Route 5
Lovell, ME 04051
(207) 925-6711
Contact: Linda Bradley,
Acting Principal

Eight Corners School
Blue Point School
Scarborough, ME 04074
(207) 883-4315
Contact: Beth Bellemere,
Curriculum Coordinator

Miller Grade School
Route 32, P.O. Box C
Waldoboro, ME 04572
(207) 832-2103
Contacts: Kay Sproul,
Beth Ogden, Teachers

New Hampshire

Oyster River Elementary School
45 Garrison Avenue
Durham, NH 03824
(603) 868-2155
Contact: Susan Newton, Principal

School Street School
School Street
Lebanon, NH 03766
(603) 448-4536
Contact: Susan Derosiers,
Acting Principal

Sunapee Central
22 School Street
Sunapee, NH 03782-2924
Contact: Helene L. Bickford

Simonds Elementary School
Church Street
Warner, NH 03278
(603) 456-2241
Contact: Carlton Fitzgerald,
Principal

New York

Early Childhood Center #78
345 Olympic Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14213
(716) 838-7464
Contacts: Nancy Kenny,
Patricia Hitzges

New York (cont.)
Colden Elementary School
Colden, NY
(716) 592-5218
Contact: Thomas Nemmer

Charlotte Avenue
Elementary School
301 Charlotte Avenue
Hamburg, NY 14075
(716) 649-6850, Ext. 220
Contact: Donald Wood

Perry Browne Elementary School
Beebe Avenue
Norwich, NY 13815
(607) 334-3211, Ext. 215
Contact: Joyce Steward

Stanford Gibson
Elementary School
Ridgeland Avenue
Norwich, NY 13815
(607) 334-3211, Ext. 215
Contact: Joyce Steward

Edison School
236 Grayton Road
Tonowanda, NY 14150
(716) 874-8416
Contact: Dorothy Vienne

New York City
P.S. 67 CSD 13
51 Edwards Street
Brooklyn, NY 11205
(718) 834-6756
Contact: Evelyn Santiago, Principal

P.S. 73 CSD 9
1020 Anderson Avenue
Bronx, NY 10452
(718) 822-5008
Contact: Lois Turetzky, Principal

P.S. 163 CSD 9
2075 Webster Avenue
Bronx, NY 10457
Contact: Anna Perez, Principal

P.S. 332 CSD 23
51 Christopher Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11212
(718) 495-7805
Contact: Richard Placente

Puerto Rico
Daskalos
Road 176, Km 5.2
Rio Piedras, PR
(809) 755-0500
Contact: Rafael Cartagena, Principal

Rhode Island
Nayatt Elementary School
Nayatt Road
Barrington, RI 02806
(401) 247-3175
Contact: Jacqueline Forbes

Primrose Hill Elementary School
60 Middle Highway
Barrington, RI 02809
(401) 247-3170
Contact: Elizabeth Durfee, Principal

Sowams School
Sowams Road
Barrington, RI 02806
(401) 247-3180
Contact: David Steele, Principal

Vermont

Essex Town School District
Essex, VT 05452

Essex Elementary School
(802) 878-2584
Contact: Robbe Brook, Principal

Essex Middle School
(802) 879-7175
Contact: Howard Magnant, Principal

Founders Memorial School
(802) 879-6326
Contact: Walter Nardelli, Principal

Montpelier Union School
One Park Avenue
Montpelier, VT 05602
(802) 223-6343
Contact: Mary Garamella, Principal

Shelburne Middle School
Harbor Road
Shelburne, VT 05482
(802) 985-3331
Contact: Carol Spencer, Principal

Shelburne Village School
2145 Shelburne Road
Shelburne, VT 05482
(802) 985-2541
Contact: Alfredo Mercaldo, Principal

Williston Central School
705 Williston Road
Williston, VT 05495
Contact: Lynn Murray, Principal

January 1994

*This is a representative rather than a comprehensive list of schools in this region that are using multiage grouping and have offered to make themselves available to others considering the practice.